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ABSTRACT

Key findings from a wellness survey conducted with University of Minnesota civil service employees are discussed. The survey was designed to provide information to guide future campus health and wellness programming. Four topics were covered: physical fitness/exercise, nutrition, self-improvement/psychological health, and general health/preventive care. On each of these topics, employees were asked about their current behavior, their awareness and usage of current programs, and their interest in future programs. A total of 362 responses were obtained from a random sample of 452 employees. The respondents split nearly evenly on a question about their general orientation toward wellness activities: 47 percent actively worked at seeking good health, while 53 percent took good health for granted and hoped they would remain healthy. Additional findings include the following: 46 percent exercised regularly, while 54 percent exercised occasionally or only on weekends; 57 percent experienced a great deal or quite a bit of stress on the job; 69 percent favored giving employees a half hour a day for exercise, while 77 percent approved giving employees "wellness days," or time off from work if they did not use sick leave; and most respondents were unaware of several wellness programs available to them on campus. (SW)

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U OF M CIVIL SERVICE WELLNESS SURVEY

Finding Out About Employees' Health and Wellness Needs

A Report of Key Findings

Prepared by

Ronald Matross and Jon Roesler

Data and Reporting Services

for

The Civil Service Wellness Committee

Deanna Smith, Chair

September 29, 1982

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THE U OF M CIVIL SERVICE WELLNESS SURVEY: KEY FINDINGS

The wellness survey

This is a report of key findings from a survey of University of Minnesota civil service employees conducted by the Civil Service Wellness Committee, Deanna Smith, chair. The survey was designed to provide information to guide future campus health and wellness programming. The survey covered four topics: physical fitness/exercise; nutrition; self-improvement/psychological health; and general health/preventative care. On each of these topics employees were asked about their current behavior, their awareness and usage of current programs, and their interest in future programs.

The survey was conducted by mail in March and April of 1982 among a random sample of 452 University civil service employees from all campuses. (Sampling was done by taking a simple random sample from a list of all University employees.) Completed returns were received from 362 for a response rate of 79%.

Key Findings

Highlighted here are some of the key findings from the study.

"Seekers versus Hopers." The respondents split nearly evenly on a question about their general orientation toward wellness activities. Forty-seven percent could be labeled as "seekers"--persons who said they don't take good health for granted, but actively work at it, seeking good health. The other 53% are "hopers"--persons who said that they take good health for granted (and hope that they will remain healthy). These two groups differed in their wellness-related behavior. (See Chart 1.) The seekers were less likely than the hopers to smoke, and eat sweets and more likely to exercise regularly, to eat fruits and vegetables, to use seat belts, to be interested in nutrition, to get physical check-ups, and to feel satisfied with their health.

Exercise. The respondents also split into two fairly even groups in their exercise habits. (See Chart 2.) Forty-six percent said they were regular exercisers (planned exercise every day or several times a week), while the other 54% exercise only from time to time or on weekends.

The most frequently cited barriers to getting more exercise were lack of time and lack of willpower.

Job Stress. Job stress is an important wellness issue among all types of employees. (See Chart 3.) Over half, 57%, said that they experience a great deal or quite a bit of stress on the job. The importance of this issue is underscored by the fact that coping with job stress and learning how to relax were the two psychological health issues most frequently cited by employees as topics they would personally like to know more about.

Support for wellness initiatives. Regardless of their current health habits, strong majorities of respondents endorsed two ideas for encouraging employee wellness. (See Chart 4.) Sixty-nine percent endorsed the first idea, that of giving employees a half hour a day for exercise; and 70% said that they would use the exercise time if it were offered. An even larger proportion, 77% approved of the second idea, giving employees "wellness days"--time off from work if they didn't use their sick leave.

Awareness and usage of current employee wellness programs. The majority of respondents were unaware of several wellness programs currently available to them, and only a small fraction had used these programs. (See Chart 5.) Majorities were unaware of University sponsored fitness assessments, exercise workshops, nutrition assessments, nutrition workshops, and weight loss programs. Actual usage figures for each of these programs were between 2 and 5%.

Interest in University-sponsored wellness programs. Despite their lack of awareness of personalized wellness programs, a majority indicated an interest in programs of this type. Some 25-35% said that they would be willing to pay a small fee for personalized assessments of their fitness, nutrition, and general health assessments. Another 28-31% said that they would be interested in these programs only if they were free.

Implications

The survey findings are likely to lend momentum to a growing movement for campus wellness programs. The strong support for exercise time and wellness days was found not only among the health "seekers" but also among the "hopers" who take their health for granted. For those who are already pursuing wellness activities the appeal of these ideas may be that they could help ease the time pressure that they feel when they try to schedule self-improvement activities. For those who are not actively involved in wellness activities, the time off may be the strong inducement they need to make a commitment to changing their lifestyles. Implementing either of these ideas would be a rather radical step for the University. However several corporations have implemented plans incorpo-

rating these ideas as well as other wellness programs. Their motivation has not been solely altruistic because they envision definite benefits in terms of improved employee productivity.

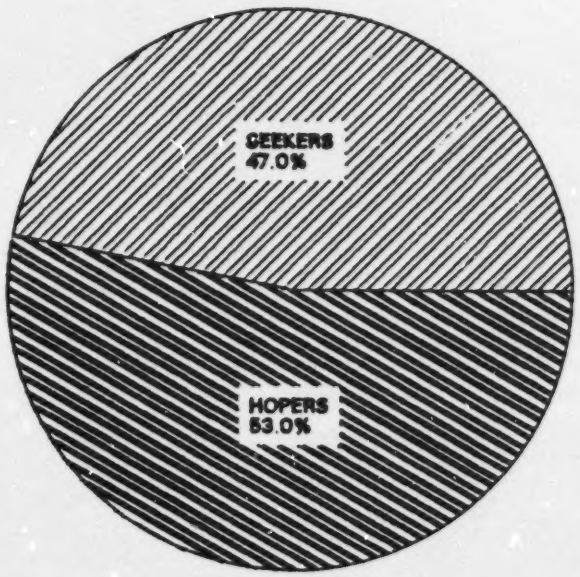
Besides showing support for possible new initiatives, the survey findings point up a need for new publicity and marketing strategies for current programs. Most respondents were unaware of the personalized wellness programs already available (primarily on the Twin Cities campus). Many more said they would be interested in using the programs (particularly if they were free) than are actually using them. Better publicity is definitely needed. Some image-changing may also be in order. Some of the respondents gave the impression that they see wellness activities as a fad, something for Richard Simmons and Jane Fonda, not for "regular" people. Specific programs to meet real employee needs might help change this perception.

One area where employees appear to have a definite need is in stress reduction. About half said that they experienced a great deal or quite a bit of job stress, and that they would personally like to know more about how to deal with stress and how to relax. These findings suggest that the University should consider new initiatives especially targeted to helping employees deal with stress, the problem which has been called "the disease of the 80's".

Further uses of the survey findings await further analyses. The Civil Service Wellness Committee will be conducting more detailed breakdowns of the data. These should help pinpoint needs of specific groups of employees, so that programs and marketing strategies can be more clearly developed. (Readers are invited to contact the Civil Service Wellness Committee to obtain more information about the survey and to offer comments or suggestions about programming. Contact Deanna Smith by phone at (612) 373-7781, and by mail at 210 Vo-Tech Building, University of Minnesota, St. Paul Campus.)

Chart 1

THE PURSUIT OF HEALTH: SEEKERS VERSUS HOPERS



The surveyed employees split nearly in half between "seekers"--those who actively work at good health, and "hopers"--those who take good health for granted (and hope they will be healthy in the future). The seekers differ from the hopers in many ways, including:

SEEKERS	HOPERS
61% are very or quite satisfied with their health	43% are very or quite satisfied with their health
62% exercise regularly	31% exercise regularly
19% smoke	29% smoke

Chart 2

EXERCISE: PARTICIPATION & BARRIERS

Respondents divided fairly evenly into a group of regular exercisers (those who get planned physcial exercise every day or several times a week) and a group of non-regular exercisers (those who exercise only on weekends or from time to time).

When asked what was the single main barrier to their getting more exercise, respondents most frequently cited:

Lack of time	44%
Lack of willpower	29%

Chart 3

JOB STRESS: AN IMPORTANT WELLNESS ISSUE

When asked how much stress they experienced on the job, a majority of respondents said that they experienced quite a bit or a great deal of stress. Concern about stress was further underscored by responses to a question about what self-improvement psychological health topics respondents would personally like to know more about. The two most frequently mentioned topics were:

Coping with job stress	52%
Learning how to relax	49%

Chart 4

SUPPORT FOR WELLNESS INITIATIVES

Respondents showed strong support for two ideas for promoting employee wellness--granting a half hour a day to be devoted to exercise, and granting "wellness days" to those employees who don't use their sick leave time.

Should the University offer employees a half hour a day for exercise?

Should	69%
Should not	19%
Don't know	12%

Would you use the exercise time if it were offered?

Probably	70%
Probably not	19%
Don't know	11%

Should the University offer "wellness days"--time off to employees who don't take sick leave?

Should	77%
Should not	13%
Don't know	10%

Chart 4

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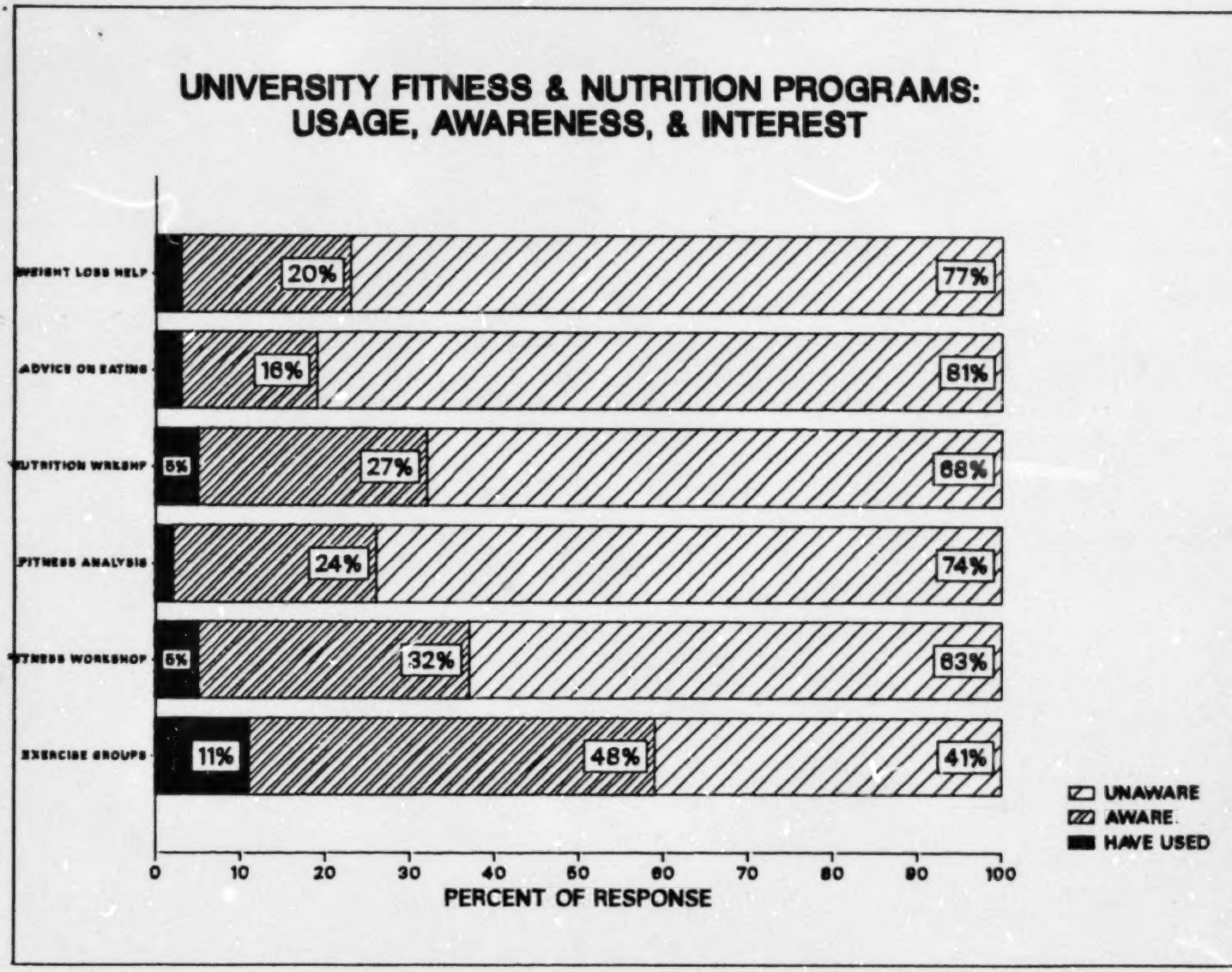
Chart 5



The University offers employees (for a fee in most cases) several different types of fitness and nutrition programs. Large majorities were unaware of these programs, and only a small fraction had used them.
However, many respondents said that they would be interested in using these programs, especially if they were free:

	Would pay to use	Would use if free	Might use	Probably wouldn't use
Personal fitness assessment	35%	31%	22%	12%
Total health assessment	39%	30%	21%	12%
Personal nutrition assessment	27%	28%	27%	18%